

Socialists and Partition



**A Socialist
Workers
Party
Pamphlet**

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Socialists oppose the partition of Ireland. It arose from a counter-revolutionary movement supported by British imperialism in order to set up a 'carnival of reaction'. This is evident from how it came about and in its effects on dividing workers.

EARLY ORIGINS OF SECTARIANISM:

Some nationalists see partition as arising from the plantation of Ulster in 1609. However, Ulster at this stage was very under-populated and many of the settlers were Presbyterian who suffered from religious discrimination by an Anglican ascendancy. Catholic tenants and Protestant tenants were often forced into competition with each other by the landlords. Sometimes they united – other times they fought each other.

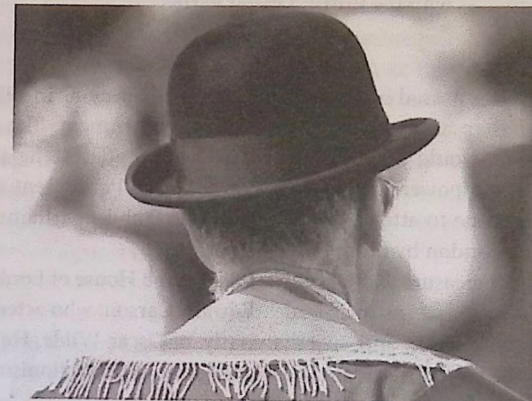
The key turning point came when the emerging Protestant bourgeoisie embraced the ideas of the French revolution and the Enlightenment. The American revolution between 1775 and 1783 shook the loyalty of the Irish settlers to the empire. Like their American counterparts, the settlers began to demand 'free trade' and an end to British restrictions on their commerce. The result was the founding of the Volunteer movement and later, when they compromised, the United Irishmen.

The United Irishmen were a bourgeois movement that took the revolutionary road. They were not, as sometimes claimed, a movement of the 'men of no property'. Rather they were led by Protestant revolutionaries who allied with the Catholic peasantry. Until the French revolution, they never thought it possible to forge such an alliance. But under the impact of these international events, this is exactly what they did.

The leader of the rebellion, Wolfe Tone, wanted a strong expeditionary force from France to inspire "men of a certain rank as to property [to] at once declare themselves" His call to the 'men of no property' came as a warning to his own class to wake up and defend their interests. In other words, if those who were the rightful leaders of society did not move against the empire, he would have to look to the poor. The United Irishmen was historically progressive. They broke through the sectarian divisions and posed a vision of unity between Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter.

A crucial factor in their defeat was the formation of the Orange Order in 1795. This was reactionary institution that sought to destroy Catholic-Protestant unity.

It drove 7,000 Catholics out of Armagh in the year of its formation. General John Knox described the Orange Order as 'the only barrier we have against the United Irishmen'.



The Orange Order, formed in 1795 was reactionary institution that sought to destroy Catholic-Protestant unity.

The poison of sectarianism in Ireland was therefore stoked up by the British empire to defeat a progressive bourgeois led movement that wanted to repeat the gains of the French revolution.

UNEVEN DEVELOPMENT

The nineteenth century was characterised by the uneven development of Irish capitalism.

The Act of Union in 1800 brought benefits to Belfast where there was a rapid growth of industry. In the first half of the century Belfast's population grew fivefold, reaching 100,000 by 1850. The first phase of expansion came through the cotton trade but, later, there was a shift to the linen trade. By 1875, there were 60,000 factory workers employed there. After 1850, Belfast acquired its second major industry, iron shipbuilding, which increasingly replaced ships made from timber.

In stark contrast, the rest of Ireland suffered economic decline. The abolition of protectionist barriers and the control by an ascendancy class contributed to the decline of nascent industry. The abolition of the Corn Laws – which opened the British market to free trade in food – removed Ireland's advantage even in agriculture.

These contrasting developments produced a conflict of interest in the capitalist class.

Northern capitalists wanted to keep open their links with the markets of the British Empire and so opposed any move to weaken the link.

The weaker Southern rich began to demand Home Rule within the empire and mainly aligned themselves with the British Liberal Party.

HOME RULE

A Home Rule Bill was passed in the British House of Commons in 1912. It was really no more than an extended form of local government. The Imperial parliament in London would continue to control foreign affairs, the army and navy. It would have the power to repeal acts of the Irish Parliament and Irish members would continue to attend Westminster. The Dublin parliament could not vary taxes set in London by more than 10 percent.

But even this mild measure was too much for both the House of Lords and the Unionists. The Unionists chose as their leader, Edward Carson, who acted as prosecutor of Land League activists and, most famously, of Oscar Wilde. He whipped up Protestant workers' fears that Home Rule would lead to protectionism and the destruction of Belfast industry.

The Unionists leaders also resorted to their traditional tactic of whipping up



Edward Carson (left) declared 'I do not care two pence whether it is treason or not. I do not shrink from the horrors of civil commotion.'

sectarian bigotry as Catholics and 'rotten Prods' were driven from their jobs in Belfast.

Carson declared 'I do not care two pence whether it is treason or not. I do not shrink from the horrors of civil commotion' The Ulster Covenant pledged to resist

Home Rule by 'all means' and to 'refuse to recognise the authority of such a parliament.

A Provisional Ulster Government was formed and a 'business' committee, chaired by a leading shipbuilder, was charged with procuring arms. 30,000 rifles and three million rounds of ammunition were subsequently landed.

The Tory Party saw the Unionist rebellion as their opportunity to get their revenge on the Liberals who had voted to remove the veto of the House of Lords. They tore apart the facade of parliamentary rule and favoured the use of armed force against their own elected government. Its leader, Bonar Law, declared that if Ulster resists, 'there are stronger things than parliamentary majorities'.

This rhetoric encouraged British army officers to mutiny when they received orders to move against the Ulster Volunteers.

The response of Redmond and the Irish Parliamentary Party exposed all their weakness. They had wanted Home Rule for the whole island. But under pressure from Asquith and the Liberals, Redmond agreed to a three year temporary exclusion of Ulster. Four days later the exclusion period was doubled to six years. Redmond then insisted on automatic inclusion of Ulster after six years but the Liberals did a deal with the Tories to grant Ulster a plebiscite. Both agreed that it would be the prerogative of the British Parliament to decide if the excluded province would come under a Dublin parliament or not.

The first steps towards partition were therefore accompanied by threats of violence to undermine even the limited democracy of the British House of Commons.

PARTITION

Between 1918-1922, Ireland was in the throes of a revolution as masses of people fought to remove the British empire. To help break that revolution, the British passed the Government of Ireland Act 1920 to create two separate parliaments in Ireland.

Originally, Unionists were opposed to a separate parliament. However, faced with the republican uprising, key figures in Unionism moved to make partition a reality. In 1919 a sub-committee of Irish Unionists chaired by Walter Long produced a report favouring the partition of the North East and the creation of two Irish parliaments. The Long report recommended that all nine Ulster counties be included but other Unionists were more attuned to the brutal sectarian realities. They knew that inclusion of the three Ulster counties with Catholic majorities would destabilise a Protestant parliament for a Protestant people. 'We quite frankly admit that we

cannot hold onto nine counties' declared Charles Craig MP.

By constructing a new state on a sectarian headcount, the British authorities were aware that it would unleash inter-communal conflict. They facilitated the creation of the illegal Ulster Volunteer Force and colluded with it. The British army supplied intelligence material on Sinn Féin and the Northern IRA to the illegal UVF.

When sectarian riots broke out after the first ever nationalist election victory for Derry City Council, UVF patrols took over the city centre while the British army stood aside.

The Derry riots were a harbinger of what was to come. In July 1920 there was a ferocious speech from Edward Carson when he urged loyalists to take matters into their own hands in dealing with the rebellion.

Shortly afterwards, a meeting was held in the Belfast shipyards 'to drive the Sinn Féiners out' and over the next few days Catholics and 'rotten Prods' who held radical or labour views were expelled. In August after a local police officer was killed by the IRA, almost all Catholics were driven out of Lisburn.

By October 1920, the UVF had raised an army of between 20,000 to 30,000 members and by that stage it was only a matter of giving it legal cover. This came with government approval to create an Ulster Special Constabulary which consisted of full time A Specials, part time B Specials and a reserve force of C Specials.

The UVF was integrated into the apparatus of the Northern state and used to keep down a catholic minority.

THE CARNIVAL OF REACTION

Partition led to a carnival of reaction in Ireland. Two conservative states were created – each with its own communal leadership who tried to unite their own populations against their enemies on the other side of the border.

Let's look at each in turn.

THE SOUTH

After independence, the Catholic Church was given a special role in enforcing moral control over the population. They took control of the schools, hospitals and many welfare organisations that replaced state provision.

Catholic morality was enshrined in legislation. In 1935, the Criminal Law Amendment Act prohibited the sale and importation of contraceptives. Married women were barred from being civil servants and this measure lasted from 1934 to 1958. A Public Dance Hall Act made it a requirement to obtain a licence from a

district justice before holding a dance.

Even beyond this legislation, Fianna Fáil established a shadow theocracy whereby proposed legislation was first filtered through the partnership of de Valera and John Charles McQuaid, the Archbishop of Dublin. McQuaid was fanatically anti-Protestant, anti-Semitic and anti-socialist. The fruit of the partnership between de Valera and McQuaid was the Constitution of 1937, dedicated to the Holy Trinity and recognising the 'special position' of the Catholic Church.

The church state alliance brought sexual repression and was aimed at inculcating a culture of obedience in the population.

In his first pastoral letter in 1941, McQuaid stated that 'It will be impossible to train youth to the maturity of Christian virtue unless from infancy the habit of obedience has become, so to speak, an instinct.'

Control of the schools was the main mechanism for achieving this and so corporal punishment and rote learning became the norm.

The Catholic Church was also useful to the wealthy because they attacked the very idea of social rights under the guise of a 'principle of subsidiarity.' In reality, this meant that the poor were to rely on charity rather than state services. As the



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Papal encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* put it, 'social charity ... ought to be as the soul of this order, an order which public authority ought to be ever ready effectively to protect and defend'. This principle was rigorously applied in Ireland and an unholy alliance was formed between the mandarins of the Department of Finance and the Catholic hierarchy to discourage social spending.

A proposal by Noel Browne to introduce a Mother and Child scheme to provide free health care and children up to the age of 16 illustrates was defeated because the Bishops declared that free health measures would 'constitute a ready-made instrument for future totalitarian aggression'.

THE NORTH

Catholics comprised one third of the six country state and so violence and repression was deployed from the very outset.

By the end of 1922, the Ulster Special Constabulary, which drew its original membership from loyalist paramilitaries, had 48,000 members. Although the A specials were disbanded after 1926 when the borders of the six counties were secured, the B Specials continued until 1970. A Special Powers Act which allowed for internment and suspension of all civil liberties was passed in 1922 and remained on the statute book until 1973.

The Unionist Party who controlled the state was led by an elite who had little concern for the Protestant working class. The big landowners provided three of Northern Ireland's premiers, Craigavon, Brookeborough, and O'Neil - but industrialists did not lack representation. Of the seven ministers in James Craig cabinet from 1921 to 1937, three were former presidents of the Belfast Chamber of Commerce, one was a partner in a large firm of solicitors, another was an industrialist and company director, and another the titled owner of one of the large landed estates.

Their primary aim was to defend the interests of Northern capitalism by keeping open access to British imperial markets. They used the Orange Order to integrate and discipline Protestant workers. In the early part of the century 60 percent of Protestant men were members of the Orange Order and while there was a slow decline, the Order still held the allegiance of many Protestant workers.

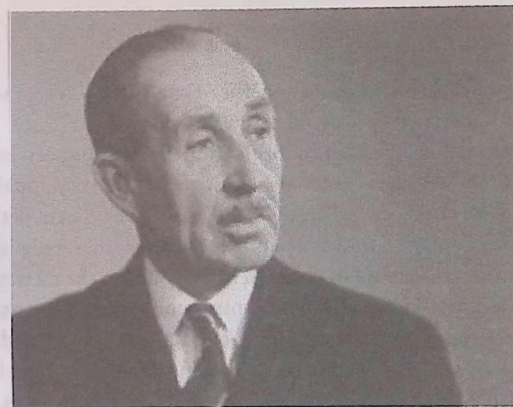
To cement that alliance they imposed wholesale discrimination against the catholic minority. In the 50 years that Unionist rule lasted, only one opposition bill was ever passed - the Wild Bird Conservation Act

The Orange Order was mobilised at any time Protestant workers showed the slightest sign of drifting leftwards. In 1932, for example, Protestant and Catholic workers struck together to demand higher pay on the Outdoor Relief schemes. After a ban on marches, rioting took place on the Falls and Shankill roads in solidarity with each other. The Orange Order, however, declared 'We desire to impress on all loyal subjects of the King, the vital necessity of standing guard against communism.' They followed it up with a demand that Protestants should employ Protestants and,

in response, Basil Brooke, later Lord Brookeborough made his infamous statement,

Many in the audience employ Catholics but I have not one about the house... In Northern Ireland, the Catholic population is increasing to a great extent. Ninety seven per cent of Roman Catholics in Ireland are disloyal and disruptive... If we in Ulster allow Roman Catholics to work on our farms we are traitors to Ulster.

The strategy of displacing working class anger into a sectarian conflict was successful. Within a short period after the joint struggle of the Catholic and Protestant unemployed, Belfast was to see another orgy of sectarian rioting when three hundred Catholics were driven from their homes and nine people died.



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Unionist hegemony was based on a guarantee of marginal privileges to Protestant workers. Discrimination in housing was widespread and linked to the maintenance of Unionist control over electoral wards. In 1958, for example, although there were seventy vacant houses in Dungannon not one went to a Catholic. Later the Cameron Commission noted that in the same council there was not one Catholic employed in the administrative, clerical and technical grades.

Overall in the civil service, the number of Catholics holding positions remained at a constant 6 percent between 1927 and 1959. Discrimination in the public sector was paralleled by a favouritism shown to Protestant workers by family owned firms run by members of the Orange Order. Typically, Catholics tended to be pushed into unskilled labouring jobs while Protestants got more skilled and secure employment.

However, while Protestant workers gained marginal privileges over Catholics, both sets of workers lost out overall. Even on the most recent estimate, Northern Irish workers are still earning just 80 percent of the equivalent rate for the same position in the rest of Britain.

The sectarian nature of the state also bolstered the most backward ideas on the status of women and gays. Despite claiming to adhere to the civil and religious liberties of British culture, there was no extension of the 1967 act which permitted women to obtain abortions. Moreover while the Sexual Offences Act de-criminalised homosexuality in Britain in 1967, it took another fifteen years before it was extended to Northern Ireland.

The Northern and Southern states were mirror images of each other and re-imposed each other.

ALL CHANGE

The Unionist monolith, which bound together Protestant workers with their Orange employers, cracked apart in the 1960s.

Partition was originally supported by British imperialism to keep hold of the industrial triangle that linked Manchester and Glasgow to Belfast. Maintaining this arrangement also had the effect of weakening the relative development of the South. This, in turn helped to secure the South as a neo-colony of Britain, supplying agricultural produce but a minimal amount of manufactured goods to the metropolis. The North, it was also hoped, would become a net contributor to the British exchequer.

By the 1960s, however, the economic basis of partition had eroded. The big bastions of Unionist industry - the family-owned firms in shipbuilding, linen and textile - were in terminal decline. Between 1949 and 1967, employment in the linen industry fell by 50 percent, while numbers in shipbuilding declined from 25,000 to 10,000. The Northern economy became more reliant on foreign multi-nationals.

DuPont managers sent over from New Jersey didn't join local Orange lodges to rub shoulders with workers.

These developments meant that it was necessary to modernise Unionist rule. But on top of that, Britain's own interests in Ireland were changing.

By the early sixties, the Southern economy had opened up to foreign multi-nationals and British firms were the first to arrive. Britain's interest was no longer just confined of the North - they had developed a strong all-Ireland focus. The British now had an incentive to clean up some of the sectarian mess in their own backyard. Hence the pressure on Unionist leader, Terence O'Neill to modernise.

O'Neill was an upper class squire who talked the language of reform but could not disguise his patronising tone. After he left his office he made known his views:

It is frightfully hard to explain to Protestants that if you give Roman Catholics a good job and a good house they will live like Protestants, because they see neighbours with cars and television sets. They will refuse to have eighteen children, but if a Roman Catholic is jobless and lives in a ghastly hovel, he will rear eighteen children on National Assistance.



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However, the Orange machine that had been constructed over decades was not so easily dismantled. It had been maintained by constant propaganda about Protestants being under siege from a hostile Southern state and the need for vigilance against disloyal Catholics. While the British elite might demand a more modernised capitalism, the Orange machine had developed interests of its own. It had bestowed marginal privileges on Protestants and these would not be given up so easily. As Eamonn McCann, pointed out 'the Orange machine, in a real sense, was Northern Ireland.'

These dynamics played themselves out in the crucial years between 1968 and 1971. Civil rights marchers were attacked by Orange mobs, the RUC and the B Specials. The Northern state could not concede equality to its Catholic citizens and the British army would simply prop it up. What had started with a modest demand for civil rights had led to the raising of the 'national question'. The very existence of two states was now at issue.

THE LEFT

The strategy of building up a civil rights movement had come from the left. When the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Movement was formed in 1967, future members of Official Sinn Féin and the Communist Party had considerable influence within it. They based their strategy on two key considerations.

First, the movement should focus exclusively on civil rights within the Northern state. At a later stage, the achievement of these demands would create the space for pursuing the idea of a united Ireland by purely political means. Talk of socialism would have to be postponed until after a united Ireland had been won. This was the 'stages theory'.

When the struggle for civil rights escalated into a confrontation with the state itself, these beliefs became straightjackets.

Instead of pointing to the unreformable nature of the Orange state, the leader-



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ship of the Official Sinn Féin began to blame the 'ultra-left' and the 'sectarian Provos' for provoking a backlash from loyalism.

They opposed demands for the abolition of Stormont even as the movement itself was putting its existence under question.

One organisation that grasped some of these dynamics was People's Democracy. Here is a leading member, Michael Farrell, spelling it out,

Firstly the border must go because it is a relic of imperialism, and in order to root out imperialism we have to root out the neo-imperialist set-up in

the South and the neo-colonial one in the North.

Secondly, Northern Ireland is completely unviable economically and only exists as a capitalist entity at the moment because of massive subventions from Britain. Similarly the South on its own is an area of small farms with very little industry. It too is completely unviable on its own and as a result is also dependent on Britain.

The unification of Ireland into a socialist republic is not only necessary for the creation of a viable economy, it must also be an immediate demand, because only the concept of a socialist republic can ever reconcile Protestant workers, who rightly have a very deep-seated fear of a Roman Catholic republic, to the ending of the border.

However, People's Democracy did not develop into a coherent revolutionary party and it was unable to develop tactical positions or more specific socialist policies in a rapidly evolving situation. It was also unable to recruit to a clearly defined organisation

The Provos, by contrast, had a simple but traditional message – the battle was underway for Irish unity and the way to achieve it was by armed struggle. It was a message that fitted with Catholics who found themselves besieged in ghettos for daring to ask for more equality.

THE RISE OF THE PROVOS

The IRA training manual, the Green Book, states 'the Army is the direct representatives of the 1918 Dail Eireann and as such are the legal and lawful government of the Irish Republic.' This is not just rhetoric – it was a literal claim. The IRA sees itself as the custodian of the First Dail and so its army council is the real, legal government of all Ireland. This direct continuity provided the moral justification of the IRA's right to conduct a war.

Yet despite the emphasis on tradition, the IRA's progress over the past thirty years comes from a series of dramatic ruptures. There were four main phases in the history of Provisional IRA/Sinn Féin.

In the first phase, from 1970 to 1972, the IRA's campaign grew out a mass resistance of to the Northern state. The Catholic ghettos were very fearful of loyalist attacks and, for a brief period, they looked to the British army for protection. However, after the Falls Road curfew when 3,000 soldiers ransacked houses in this compact Catholic area, this changed. Defence came to mean warding off both loyalist attacks and repression from the British army.

Support for the Provos escalated after the introduction of internment in 1971 which was directed exclusively against the Catholic population.

By August 1971, the Provisional IRA had grown to 1,200 members and was organised under brigade staff and companies or active service units.

Yet despite its overwhelmingly working class character, the ideology of the Provos was that of a highly traditional organisation. Their leaders rejected 'extreme' socialism and wanted a return to the *Comhar na gComharsan* (Neighbourhood Co-operation) policy that had originally been developed by IRA leaders in rural Ireland in 1939. This was described as a mid-way position between the twin evils of capitalism and communism, which conformed to Catholic social teaching.

The Provisional IRA leadership identified left wing politics as a threat to republicanism. So the political wing, Sinn Féin, was made subservient and no one would gain any standing in the movement unless they served their time in the army.

One result was that the Provos adopted a purely military strategy that played down the mass mobilisation. After internment, tens of thousands took part in a rent and rates strike and 8,000 people in Derry took part in a one day strike. But the main republican response was to engage in a bombing campaign that focussed on economic targets. Pubs, offices and shops in town centres were deemed to be legitimate targets and bombed.

The second phase of the IRA campaign, lasting from 1972 to 1975, was one of *misplaced military optimism and near defeat*. It began when the British government responded to the mass upsurge of protest after Bloody Sunday by abolishing the Stormont regime and promoting power sharing with the Sunningdale agreement.

The agreement split the nationalist movement as middle class Catholics saw their opportunity to gain status within Northern Ireland. But reform from above also provoked a massive response within Unionism. A loyalist strike, backed up by considerable intimidation, tore down the Sunningdale agreement.

The IRA strategy of bombing their way to the negotiating table played directly into the hands of the British and Irish governments. A few months after the fall of Stormont, the IRA set off twenty car bombs in Belfast in just over an hour, killing nine people in what became known as Bloody Friday. The scale of the killings revolted many and led to a considerable loss of support.

The Southern population had no direct experience of loyalist attacks or the brutality of the British army and were even more outraged. The result was a growing alienation and an isolation of the struggle to the Catholic ghettos. Ten days after Bloody Friday, the British army used the revulsion at the IRA actions to launch Op-

eration Motorman. Five thousands soldiers bulldozed their way through the barricades of the no-go area of Free Derry and re-took it.

To compound these difficulties, the IRA leadership simply stuck to their purely military strategy and believed that if only this was conducted in a more ruthless and



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determined fashion the British would be driven out. Daithi O'Connell explained the strategy,

The Brits can be beaten. Collins, for example, demonstrated the effectiveness of ruthless, well directed actions in smashing the British secret service in Dublin. It was this sort of attitude that was lacking in the '56 campaign. That was fought with kid gloves. That attitude has now been eliminated.

This approach bordered on the illusionary. *An Poblacht*, the Sinn Féin paper, ran with the headline '1974 - Bliain an Bua- Victory Year'. Four months later, the headline was 'Brits Get Ready to Pull Out'. Based on this gross overestimate of their own impact and a misreading of British intentions, the IRA entered a truce with the British government.

FROM LEFT RHETORIC TO PAN NATIONALISM

The third phase of the IRA campaign which lasted from 1976 to 1987 might be termed the period of *the long war and leftist rhetoric*.

It began when a group of prisoners led by Gerry Adams criticised the republican leadership for the truce. They presented themselves as more hard-line and suggested

that the Southern based leadership of the IRA lacked a strategic sense. Writing under the pseudonym Brownie, Adams argued that

'there is only one time to talk peace and that is when the war has been won not while it is raging. The time to talk peace is when the British have left Ireland, otherwise they will find some excuse to remain.'

In recognition of the demoralised state of the IRA, all talk of imminent victory was dropped and instead a new 'long war' strategy was adopted. The guerrilla movement was re-organised into a cell structure. The new Adams leadership set out to modernise republicanism. The key to this was the embrace of a left rhetoric.

The South was characterised as a neo-colony where the ruling class was 'not based primarily on native capitalism but [was] an agent class, acting as agents for foreign capital.' The economic ills that Southern workers were suffering were, therefore, directly linked to British interference. The IRA struggle was presented as a vanguard movement that was fighting against a direct colony in the North and a neo-colony in the South.

The IRA was declared to be a socialist organisation and in a document written for the IRA known as the 'gray document' Adams argued,

Furthermore with James Connolly, we believe that the present system of society is based on the robbery of the working class and that capitalist property cannot exist without the plundering of labour. We desire to see capitalism abolished and a democratic system of common or public ownership. This democratic system, which is called socialism, will, we believe, come as a result of the continuous increase of power of the working class.

The militancy of the language may, at first sight, come as a surprise. But nationalist movements have always been Janus faced – they can look in two directions at once because loyalty to the nation trumps any class interests. Even in the heyday of this rhetoric, there were clear signs that the republican use of socialist language was entirely instrumental. It was a means to an end – one of broadening out IRA support. Significantly, even while engaged in left rhetoric, the republican leadership began its long term relationship with a very right wing US Republican party member, Peter King, who went on to back Donald Trump for US President.

The rhetoric about socialism also lacked an important element – any recognition that it was the working class, as a class, that could free itself. The IRA volunteer remained the key agent of change. Adams argued that the armed struggle provided

the 'vital cutting edge' and that other forms of struggle would 'complement' it. Workers action was not deemed to be essential for change but was merely supportive of IRA volunteers. And as for Protestant workers, these were simply dismissed as a reactionary block that could be ignored until after Ireland was united.

In 1986, Sinn Féin finally dropped its abstentionist position on the Dáil and Stormont. The grassroots were promised an 'armalite and ballot box' strategy but were informed the first was primary. Martin McGuinness wrote

We know that elections, while important, ... will not achieve a British withdrawal. If Sinn Féin were to win every election it contested, it would still not get an agreement on British withdrawal ... We recognise the value and the limitations of electoral success. We recognise that only disciplined, revolutionary armed struggle by the IRA will end British rule.

The fourth phase of the IRA campaign which lasted from 1987 to 2005 was based on *pan-nationalism and de-commissioning*.

The IRA campaign had lasted longer than any previous struggle and had outlasted many other urban guerrilla movements. But by the 1990s, it was clear that it could not break through and that the risks of defeat had risen.

In May 1987, the Redemptorist priest, Father Alex Reid delivered a message to Charles Haughey containing a message from Gerry Adams. It suggested the possibility of a ceasefire that 'could mean taking the gun out of nationalist politics forever'. The strategic aim of Sinn Féin was now to 'construct an Irish nationalist consensus with international support' and thus create a pan nationalist alliance. There was an open acknowledgement that the armed struggle could not bring progress and so it was necessary to gain support from the political establishment. A TUAS document distributed to the IRA stated that

Republicans at this time and on their own do not have the strength to achieve the end goal. The struggle needs strengthening most obviously from other nationalist constituencies led by SDLP, Dublin government and the emerging Irish-American lobby, with additional support from other parties in E.U. rowing in behind and accelerating the momentum created.

Far from aiming at the overthrow of the Southern state, the political establishment were now to play a positive role. The US could pressure Britain to change direction and Britain in turn could become 'persuaders' for a united Ireland among Protestant workers. Instead of the earlier republican vision, that united Ireland would come through a revolt against both states, there was a belief that it could be forged from above. The result was

the Good Friday agreement of 1998.

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They suggested that the North-South Ministerial council, - contained in the agreement - could create a dynamic that led to a united Ireland. If there were Sinn Fein Ministers in government in both states, there could be greater 'harmonisation' across Ireland. As Eoin OBroin put it, 'Sinn Fein in government in the North, and at a future date in the South, would place the party in key positions of institutional power from which to drive the agenda for reunification.'

This 'institutional power' would be supplemented by the creation of an all-Ireland economy and the combined pressures would then eventually erode partition. The creation of a power sharing Executive within Northern Ireland was also supposed to help change the perceptions of Protestants.

Republicanism today – with the exception of a small number of dissidents - means relying on official state structures to bring about Irish unity

NEOLIBERALISM AND INSTITUTIONAL SECTARIANISM

In 2000, Gerry Adams predicted that a united Ireland could be achieved by 2016. Martin McGuinness expressed a similar optimism,

With devolved government up and running we are able to bring together ministers and political leaders from north and south to commemorate the men and women of 1916 who could only dream of the new Ireland we now live in.

These predictions were, to put it mildly, somewhat optimistic.

The harsh reality is that the radical republicans of yesteryear have become government Ministers responsible for running a failed Northern state. The economy viability of Northern Ireland is now in question because its manufacturing base has shrunk and what remains of it is highly dependent on grants and subsidies. One study suggested that without these subsidies, there would have been no pre-tax profits in this sector between 1970 and 1992. It has become an economy dependent on low paid services and a large public sector employing one in three workers compared to less than one in five in Britain. Relative living standards are only 75 percent of the UK average even though workers work longer.

In the dry words of one consultancy group 'the overall outlook for NI is particularly downbeat'. The key problem is that Northern Ireland is being run on a huge fiscal deficit of an estimated £9.6 billion – at a very time when Britain as a whole is engaged in a major downsizing of its public sector.

The solution that the republican leadership have accepted as government Ministers is neoliberalism. The North, it is suggested, has to be 'rebalanced' to create a stronger private sector and the way to do that is to cut taxes on business. Sinn Fein and the Democratic Unionist Party engage in a hostile rhetoric against each other but both agreed to cut the rate of corporation tax to 12.5%. To get this tax reduction, both parties signed up to the Stormont House Agreement. This involved an agreement for a 'balanced budget' principally by welfare reform and by cutting 20,000 public sector jobs. The Northern Ireland Executive agreed to borrow €700 million to promote these 'voluntary exits'. Both the DUP and Sinn Fein now have to explain why it is necessary to subsidise big business by cuts to public services.

The way out for both parties lies in an intensification of communal politics – even while they co-operate together in government. Contrary to some media hype, the Good Friday Agreement was not about eliminating sectarianism but about the management of enmity. Sectarian competition was inscribed into the very structures of the reformed state and a premium was put on 'ethnic outbidding'. The agreement set up a political system whereby the most hard line representatives of the rival communities were sent to the Northern Executive to fight for their side.

Thus the DUP emerged as the largest unionist Party by heightening a rhetoric about the Catholics getting everything while Sinn Fein dominated the nationalist block by pre-

senting itself as the strongest at promoting an 'equality agenda' – meaning equality between Protestants and Catholics within Northern Ireland.

The result is that each economic 'reform' is filtered through the prism of which



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'community' gained most or lost most. Even though both the DUP and Sinn Féin agree on the fundamentals of the neoliberal solution, they shore up their working class base by constant talk of communal competition. Both parties promote cuts to public services and then claim that it was the 'other side' which pushed the cuts affecting 'their community'.

As Murtagh and Shirlow suggest, 'the DUP and Sinn Féin have entered a 'game-keeper by day' and 'poacher by night' scenario in which they promote unity by day and sectarian gatekeeping by night.'

The Belfast Agreement cannot therefore be used to bring about an end to partition and sectarianism.

TWO ROTTEN STATES

Instead of thinking that a united Ireland will arise out of the fusion of two rotten states, it is better to see the possibility arising in opposition to them.

The current Northern state is based on institutionalised sectarianism. Elected members have to declare themselves Unionist, Nationalist or 'Other'. The First Minister is always from the largest Unionist or Nationalist party, the Deputy First Minister from the largest party on the 'other side'. Every election consists of two parallel contests to elect the party seen as the best champion of 'their own' community. Any

elected representatives who want to opt out of the sectarian headcount by designating 'Other' are consigned to the margins when it comes to voting in the Assembly on issues requiring 'cross-community support', for example. Thus the 'new' Stormont institutionalises sectarianism in a fundamental way.

The result is that Northern Ireland is in an almost permanent state of crisis, as sectarian animosities are continually inflamed over flags, parades and sharp differences over how to deal with the past. Consequently, rather than watching the slow decay of sectarianism we regularly witness its resurgence. The political structures in place in the North have not only proven consistently incapable of challenging it: they are part of the problem, and there is widespread exasperation among ordinary people at the lack of progress in moving forward.

But if there is still a deep rot at the heart of the Northern state, there is also one, albeit a different one, at the heart of the Southern state.

The Southern state presents itself as more liberal and cosmopolitan. But the gains that were achieved against Church domination came through a struggle from below – mainly against the officials of the Southern state.

In the 1980s, for example, the state only legislated for contraception for 'bona fide' family planning purposes – in other words, only for married people. However, the majority of people mocked this stupidity while student unions installed condom vending machines.

The state banned not only information on abortion but also the right to receive information or to travel freely to avail of it. However, massive demonstrations over the X case where a 14 year old girl who had been raped was prevented from travelling to Britain forced through major changes.

Despite these changes, however, the Southern state is still deeply tied into Catholic structures that have existed for decades. There are hardly any state run primary schools. Instead 90% of all primary schools are controlled by the Catholic church. Children who are not baptised go to the end of a queue for enrolment. A number of Ireland's major voluntary hospitals such as St Vincent's are run by Catholic orders that impose their particular view of ethics on medical operations. Even when they relinquish control, as occurred in the Mater hospital, they insist on the retention of a Catholic ethos.

The lack of social rights for the population is evident in the poor level of public services. Hospital waiting lists are terrible; there are virtually no council houses being built; schools are under-funded and resourced.

The fundamental reason behind this is that Southern Ireland has been re-or-

ganised as a tax haven for global corporations. Companies like Apple got away with paying between 1% and 0.0005% on huge profits for over a decade. There is an officially low tax rate of 12.5% on profits but this is only used for initial moves to attract big business. The real rate is 6% and this means that the burden of running the state falls predominantly on PAYE workers who must make do with poor public services.

Irish unity will not be achieved by fusing two weak and rotten capitalist states together – it can only come through fundamental change where they are replaced by a 32 county socialist state.

A 32 COUNTY SOCIALIST IRELAND

The call to unite Ireland on this basis goes back to James Connolly. He thought that only a bold call for a socialist Ireland could hold any appeal to Protestant workers. There was, quite simply, no future for Protestant workers in a capitalist Ireland under the green flag,

When the Sinn Feiner speaks to men who are fighting against low wages and tells them that the Sinn Fein body has promised lots of Irish labour at low wages to any foreign capitalist who wished to establish in Ireland, what wonder if they come to believe that a change from Toryism to Sinn Feinism would simply be a change from the devil they do know to the devil they do not.

This is even truer today. Protestant workers are facing a dramatic decline in living standards as the manufacturing base which gave them jobs declines. They will not accept a united Ireland where there is a perceived possibility of even lower living standards and a fear of discrimination against them. The only way they can break the hold of the reactionary ideas of loyalism is when there is a fight for an Ireland where all workers stand to make gains.

Moreover, there is little point pretending that a united capitalist Ireland will create a new 'synergy' which leads to increased wealth for all.

The reality is that capitalism on both sides of the border has proved to be a failure for the majority. In every second decade of its existence, hundreds of thousands have been forced to emigrate from Southern Ireland. After a brief success during the Celtic Tiger, the pattern of forced emigration has returned again. Irish capitalism is inherently weak and because of its weakness gravitates towards state hand-outs. This is why corruption and bribery are such an endemic part of Irish society. Capitalists, literally, need to grease the hands of the state elite in order to get the subsidies, con-

tracts and safe tenders they need.

There is no prospect that by adding another failed capitalist entity – the Northern state – to the South that living standards will improve and corruption will be eliminated. Instead of harmonising corporation taxes at a low level and cutting public services, we need an Ireland which will challenge the rich and demand a re-distribution of resources in favour of workers.

How might this occur?

Nationalists start from the idea of territorial unity and sometimes add on a rhetoric about social class to achieve their primary goal.

Socialists start with the aspirations and demands of working people today and seek to convince them this will require a challenge to capitalism and partition.

Small numbers can be won to the idea of a socialist Ireland as the only way to solve Ireland's sectarian nightmare. We should actively seek to do that by winning Catholic and Protestant workers to a strategy of fighting for an Ireland based on fundamental change. This means constant propaganda to explain concretely why such an Ireland is the only way forward.

But while small numbers can be won to this idea now, the mass of working people are more likely to become politicised and change their own ideas in struggle. The huge protests, for example, overwater charges gave hope to the poorest section of workers and convinced many that it was possible and necessary to resist. With that active resistance came a new, class based, way of seeing the world and a shift to the left.

The most immediate task facing socialists today is to build an all Ireland movement against austerity. This involves many small struggles, where we push for active resistance and people power. Our aim is to co-ordinate such struggle, to develop networks of solidarity so that growing numbers of people are willing to resist austerity in both their communities and workplaces.

The greater and more intense such struggles against austerity become on both sides of the border the more politicised workers become. We will support workers fighting austerity unconditionally but we shall also seek to win people to an understanding that their demands will not be granted under Irish capitalism, either in its tax haven version in the South or shrunken version in the North – or any combination that unites them.



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